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ABSTRACT

General education is the process of developing a framework on which to place knowledge stemming from various sources, of learning to think critically, develop values, understand traditions, and respect diverse cultures and opinions. Its rationale is the freedom enjoyed by an informed citizen. General education has had an unstable history due to shifts in organizing principles, failure of consistent definition, lack of leadership, inroads made by excessive departmentalization, the decline of literacy, among others--all problems more pronounced in community colleges than in universities. The crosscurrents affecting community colleges generally also affect their involvement with general education. The race is on between courses and anti-courses; curriculum is in jeopardy of disintegrating into a set of haphazard events. The key question is not whether general education will survive, but for whom and how. It must be put together in a fashion that serves the various types of students attending community colleges. A general education curriculum demands a faculty group working together, a program head, vertical integration, and its own budget. It should provide modules and specially designed courses for occupational students, integrated thematic courses for transfer students, and special problems courses for the growing number of adult drop-ins. (BB)

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THE CASE FOR GENERAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Paper presented to Forum on the "Future Purposes, Content, and Formats for the General Education of Community College Students," Montgomery College, Maryland, May 22, 1978

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THE CASE FOR GENERAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Repeatedly, like waves, the questions of what programs the community colleges shall offer come up. How much and what kind of occupational education? What types of general or liberal education? What can we do to make our programs relevant to the community? How far shall we go in remedial, developmental, or adult basic education? Arguments on these issues arise in our curriculum committees, conventions, and informal meetings. And spoken or not, they underlie decisions about enrollments, finances, and control.

The same questions are raised also by our brethren in the universities. On general education alone we hear calls for reform, questions of definition, and demands for returns to a core curriculum on the one hand, and for increasing accommodation to the individual on the other. Hardly an issue of Educational Record, Educational Forum, or Change magazine goes by without an article about general education. The United States Commissioner of Education has recently co-authored a book on the topic (Boyer & Kaplan, 1977). The roster of universities where general education has been urged in the past couple of years reads like a roll call of the major institutions in our country. The Cornell University Committee on General Education has submitted its recommendation. A Stanford University curriculum committee has proposed a required course in Western culture. A Harvard University committee has recommended an entire curriculum restructured around the idea of general education. Berkeley has just adopted new breadth requirements.

What are they talking about? Why now? And what is the relevance of all these arguments to education in community colleges? In this paper I propose to define general education, discuss its past and present incarnation, speculate on why it subsided and why it is coming back now, discuss its organizing principles, offer a rationale for general education in community colleges, and plot its future. I define general education as the process of developing a framework on which to place knowledge stemming from various sources, of learning to think critically, develop values, understand traditions, and respect diverse cultures and opinions. It is holistic, not specialized, integrative, not fractionated, suitable for action as well as for contemplation. Its purpose is to assist people in shaping their own destiny.

This is an appropriate time for a discussion of general education in community colleges. The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education published a book last year indicating the imminence of the first curriculum reforms in higher education in 30 years. They say the time is right because the test scores of students entering college are down, and we know that something is wrong in precollegiate education. Further, students seem to learn less in college. And even though remedial education has been tried by all types of colleges, it is difficult to show the efficacy of these efforts. The Council proposes a reform toward integration in a curriculum that has become fractionated, toward education in values in a curriculum that has purported to be value-free. They seek a return to general education.

So it is one more time around for general education. What happened to it the first time it flourished, in the early 19th century? And the second time, between 1920 and 1950? General education can be traced to

the moral philosophy courses found in American colleges during their first 200 years. These were integrative experiences taught usually by the college president and presented to all students. Remnants of the integrated course pulling together knowledge from all areas may still be seen in the capstone courses that are required of all students in a few contemporary institutions. However, that type of general education broke apart in most colleges in the second half of the 19th century, to be replaced by the free elective system. No longer were there to be courses that all students would take; no longer would the colleges attempt to bring together threads of all knowledge in a unified theme. Blame the rise of the academic disciplines, the professionalization of the faculty, the broadening of knowledge in all areas, the increased numbers of students each with with their own agendas--all these accusations have been made. But for whatever reason, the elective system took over. The old classical curriculum died out, taking with it the idea of the curriculum as a unified whole to be presented to all students. By the turn of the 20th century most American colleges had come down to an irreducible minimum in curriculum: faculty with academic degrees teaching courses of their choice to those students who elected to study with them.

All curriculum is at bottom a statement a college makes about what it thinks is important. The free elective system is a philosophical statement quite as much as is a curriculum based on the Great Books or one solely concerned with occupational education. Free election--any student, any course--is an admission that the college no longer has the moral authority to insist on any combination of courses, that it no longer recognizes the validity of sequence or organized principles of

curriculum integration. The system was not without its critics. The Carnegie plan--assigning units of credit for hours of study--was introduced in an attempt to bring order out of the free elective curricular chaos. It had the opposite effect: by ascribing units of credit of apparently equal merit, it snipped to pieces whatever unity was left in the academic subjects themselves. Three credits of algebra had the same meaning as three credits of the calculus; a three-credit introductory course in a discipline was of equal value with an advanced seminar in the same field. When a student may accumulate any 120 credit hours and obtain a baccalaureate degree, when all credits are the same, all unity of knowledge falls apart.

The initial reaction against the free elective system gave rise to distribution requirements--curriculum defined by bureaucratic organization. Groups of courses were specified in a process of political accommodation among academic departments. For the history department to vote a six-unit English requirement, the English department was expected to reciprocate by voting a six-unit history requirement. Protecting departmental territory became the curriculum organizer. Placing a disintegrated mass of free elective courses into a set of distribution requirements gives the appearance of providing the curriculum with a rationale. And so the noble truths of general studies arose post-hoc to justify the politics of distribution. And so we see statements that colleges provide a breadth of studies ensuring that their students leave as well-rounded individuals. And so the Carnegie Council found recently that students spend about 1/3 of their time in college taking distributive requirements, the other thirds going to the major and to electives. The political accommodations among departments are in equilibrium.

The success of distribution requirements as an organizing principle for curriculum did not stop those who advocated curriculum integration. Their early attempts to return order were founded in survey courses. Columbia University's Contemporary Civilization course, first offered in 1919, is usually seen as the prototype. These courses give the overview, the broad sweep in history, the arts, the sciences, and social sciences. The academic discipline is the organizing principle of the course, but the course is supposed to show the unity of knowledge, to integrate disparate elements from many disciplines. Survey courses became quite popular during the 1920s and 1930s. Surveys of social sciences, for example, were built into the Individual in Society courses. The humanities surveys became Modern Culture and the Arts. Separate surveys of natural, physical, and biological sciences also flourished.

Advocates of survey courses had constantly to fight to maintain the integrity of their offerings against the faculty tendency to convert each course into the introduction to a discipline, to teach concepts and terminology in a particular academic specialization as though all students were majors in the field. Their argument against the survey course was that it was too superficial and attempted to encompass too many different portions of human knowledge. And as each course slid away from true interdisciplinary orientation to become the first course in an academic discipline, it tended to lose its general education characteristics.

Nonetheless the interdisciplinary courses fared well and many survived. Much depends on the level of specialization within the discipline. The social science instructors have had little trouble putting together political science, sociology, economics, and anthropology into a general social science survey. The science instructors, on the other

hand, may feel they are teaching a general survey if they integrate everything from molecular to organismic biology into one course. It is considerably more difficult for them to include the physical and earth and space sciences. In 1935 Cowley found social science courses first in number of colleges offering surveys, followed by natural science, physical science, biological science, and only a few humanities surveys (Johnson, 1937). However, the humanities surveys have fared better recently; in fact, enrollments in integrated humanities courses in community colleges have increased in the past couple of years in the face of a decline in literature, history, cultural anthropology, philosophy, and other discipline-based humanities.

At the end of the 19th century general education suffered from the free elective system, the broadening of knowledge properly a part of the college curriculum, and the rise of faculty power and the academic department. In a recent history of the undergraduate curriculum, Rudolph (1977) stated, "Where highly publicized general education requirements reshaped the course of study in the 1940s and 1950s, less publicized erosion of those requirements took place in the 1960s and 1970s" (p. 253). What happened to it this time? Rudolph said that general education fell victim to faculty power, lack of student interest, increased demands on faculty time, difficulty in integrating the disciplines, and most of all from its lack of demonstrated value and from the fact that the breadth in general education offerings invited superficial treatments. All this and more--general education has remained a noble idea but a practical backwater in most of American higher education.

The history of the integrated course is instructive. Many colleges that tried it shifted to distribution requirements and subsequently

returned to some other configuration of common courses. As one example, Santa Fe Community College (Florida) opened in 1966 with common courses in science, social science, and humanities. In 1972 the integrated courses were dropped and distribution requirements installed. By 1977 they were studying the possibility of integrating general education into all courses. In another example, Miami-Dade Community College developed an integrated humanities course when the college opened in 1960 and hired instructors particularly to teach it. Over the years, however, the course became eight weeks each of art, philosophy, music, literature--a mosaic pattern. The college did not build an integrated science course, and the general education requirement in science may be satisfied by choosing two courses from a given list. By practice, not program amendment, the second half of a six-unit communications requirement evolved into an emphasis on literature. At last report the college was considering the development of integrated courses again in all areas (Lukenbill, 1977).

These patterns have been repeated in two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities nationwide. Not all are in one direction; some colleges are moving toward common course requirements at the same time that others are dropping theirs in favor of distribution requirements. Why this vacillation? Why can't general education be sufficiently persuasive to maintain itself in all colleges at all times?

A good part of general education's difficulty rests with its definition. The term has been in use for more than 60 years and defined innumerable times. It has been seen as narrowly as the trivium and quadrivium, the discipline of the medieval scholars, and as broadly as

that education which integrates and unifies all knowledge. It has been confounded with the liberal arts and it has been connected to the human developmental cycle. It has been defined as what it is not.

Consider some of the definitions. On the side of breadth, the 1939 yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education saw general education as concerned with the "widest possible range of basic human activities." It was to guide the student "to the discovery of the best that is currently known in thought." It was "dynamic," "democratic," "systematic." The student was to gain "a real grasp of the most widely ramifying generalized insights--intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic" (p. 12). The 1945 Harvard "Redbook," General Education in a Free Society, also announced that general education was to bring all knowledge together. And in an argument for general education in the high school, George Henry (1956) called for an education that would achieve a "qualitative synthesis."

Another way of looking at general education is in terms of its being that which everyone should know. In 1944 the American Council on Education noted, "general education refers to those phases of nonspecialized and nonvocational education that should be the common denominator, so to speak, of educated persons as individuals and as citizens in a free society" (p. 7). In the proceedings of a 1959 Florida Junior College Conference on General Education the idea of commonality, those learnings that should be possessed by all persons, was articulated repeatedly. Recently Boyer and Kaplan argued for the common core, that which should be taught to all students. They spoke of a need for "comprehensive literacy," and "an awareness of symbol systems," that everyone in contemporary society must possess (p. 67).

Another way of defining general education is to compare it with liberal education. Educators have always agreed that education should be useful for something (all curriculums are justified for their practical value). The apologists for liberal education have held that it frees people from such external tyrannies as caste biases, societal constraints, and professional experts as well as from the internal tyrannies of ignorance, prejudice, superstition, guilt, and what the Thomists might call, "the appetites." It has to do with the virtues and has been rationalized as affording knowledge for its own sake. In general education, on the other hand, knowledge is power--the power of coping, understanding, mastering the self and social interaction. It must lead to the ability to do, to act; gaining rationality alone is not enough. General education sees the person using what he has learned, acting intelligently. This view has the construct grounded in the everyday affairs of a person: dealing with supervisors and coworkers, choosing associates, coping with family problems, and spending leisure time in particular ways. To be successful a general education program not only makes explicit the skills and understandings to be attained but also relates those competencies to external referents, to what the person is doing when he has gained them. As Mark Schlesinger notes, "The crucial question involves what the student <u>does</u> with the bits of information he/she picks up in a course or text, or from personal experience. If all we ask is that the student remember it, we do a disservice" (1977, p. 42).

Accordingly, general education is often defined in terms of the competencies to be gained by those whom it touches. The group studying general education in California community colleges in the early 1950s

came up with a list of 12 competencies that were to be exercised by those who were generally educated:

-- exercising the privileges and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.
-- developing a set of sound moral and spiritual values by which he guides his life.
-- expressing his thoughts clearly in speaking and writing, and in reading and listening with understanding.
-- using the basic mathematical and mechanical skills necessary in everyday life.
-- using methods of critical thinking for the solution of problems and for the discrimination among values.
-- understanding his cultural heritage so that he may gain a perspective of his time and place in the world.
-- understanding his interaction with his biological and physical environment so that he may adjust to and improve that environment.
-- maintaining good mental and physical health for himself, his family, and his community.
-- developing a balanced personal and social adjustment.
-- sharing in the development of a satisfactory home and family life.
-- achieving a satisfactory vocational adjustment.
-- taking part in some form of satisfying creative activity and in appreciating the creative activities of others (Johnson, 1952).

This list, or portions thereof, still appears verbatim in many community college catalogs because it gives the appearance of being competency-based even though it is sufficiently broad to justify any course or program.

The common denominators--knowledge for action and integrative experiences--are the cornerstones of general education. But one more definition must be included, that which general education is not. Many writers define it by exclusion; it is nonspecialized, nonvocational. It is not occupational education, even though some things taught in occupational programs are pertinent to it. It is not learning to use the tools of a discipline or learning a specialized language. A report of a conference held at a community college in Florida in 1976 offers a recent example of definition by exclusion:

> At the operational level, general education ...is not special; that is, it is not designed for specific groups of people or special activities....It is <u>not</u> an introduction to disciplines as the first step in specialization. It is <u>not</u> content for its own sake. It is <u>not</u> the development of skills or the acquisition of knowledge precisely for their applicability to a job, a career, or another specialization. It is <u>not</u> a collection of courses. It is <u>not</u> simply a rearrangement of content, like an interdisciplinary program or course for the sake of being interdisciplinary. It is <u>not</u> so abstract and future-oriented that it can only be hoped for, wished for, or assumed to happen somewhere, sometime. It is <u>not</u> merely being able to read, to write, and to do arithmetic (AAC, p. 13-14).

Given the plethora of definitions, general education's failure to maintain itself consistently is easily understood; it is prey to any group with a strict view of curriculum. Throughout this century the

same forces within the academy that splintered knowledge into academic disciplines have continued their antagonism to a general or unifying education. The academic profession had become departmentalized in its specializations, thus posing a contradiction for the integration of learning. The academic departments insisted that students pick a major--the earlier the better. Courses were built as introductions to disciplines with their own logic, terminology, goals, organizing principles, modes of inquiry; adding distribution requirements while leaving the internal organization of the course intact did not enhance knowledge integration, common learnings, or competencies. In short, the academic discipline with its hold on the faculty and the organization of the college is the first and most pervasive deterrent to general education.

A second restriction has persisted because of the definitions themselves. If general education is defined by what it is not--not preparing students for careers or entering into graduate schools--instead of what it is, it is open to any type of course or experience. Constantly denying the restrictive organization of occupational and discipline-based education has propelled general education into the areas of unstructured events, counseling activities, courses without content, programs with broad goals impossible of attainment--the anti-curriculum.

The breadth of the positive side of the definition hurt too. The most specialized course in Elizabethan Literature might lead the student to "understand his cultural heritage." The most trivial course in personal habits and grooming might assist the student to "maintain good mental and physical health." Guidance and orientation programs could assist the student to "develop a balanced personal and social adjustment," and so on throughout the list of competencies and throughout the range

of activities and services provided by colleges. Where anything can be related to general education, it falls victim to the whims and fashions of students, faculty, and administrators alike.

Third, general education was tainted early on. The phrase, "terminal general education," was in use in the 1930s, suggesting that this was an education for the student who would never go on to the higher learning. In many cases separate colleges within colleges were devised as holding tanks for students deemed unqualified to enter the regular programs. Here they would get the last of their formal education, nondisciplinary, nonspecialized, and of dubious merit. If general education were seen as a curriculum for students unable to do real college work, it was doomed to suffer. Perhaps it was an extension of high school general education but then, what was it doing in a real college? And how could a self-respecting faculty member have anything to do with it? Credit the idea of terminal general education as one of the factors leading to general education's failure to hold the attention of the academy.

A fourth input to the unstable history of general education may be found in its emphasis on individual life adjustment. Early proponents of general education fostered guidance activities. Johnson, a spokesperson for general education during much of his half century in higher education, said in 1937, "uniformly colleges committed to general education stress guidance. This is reasonable for if general education aims to help the individual adjust to life, it is essential to recognize that this adjustment is an individual matter--dependent upon individual abilities, interests, and needs. Upon these bases the colleges assist the student to determine his individual objectives and mould a program to attain them" (p. 12). If the individual is to mould a program based

on his own "abilities, interests, and needs," then anything may be seen as general education for that individual. The person may take the most specialized courses or no courses at all. Such a definition dooms the idea of integrated courses, indeed, of all common courses. Thus, general education in the 1930s was so fractionated that it included both the Great Books curriculum and life adjustment courses and student guidance.

Although seen less frequently now as a rationale for general education, the idea that the student should be led to a "satisfactory vocational adjustment" was common in definitions of general education in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. Occupational education has achieved great success in American colleges and universities but for different reasons: it is built on an alliance of educators seeking support and of business people seeking workers trained at public expense; it has capitalized on legislators who are pleased to assign schools the task of mitigating unemployment; it has been enhanced by parental dissatisfaction with students challenging social mores, parents who want the schools to teach their children to do something productive. It has done well, and if it is a part of general education, then general education has done well too. But when general education is defined as leading students to understand relationships between themselves and society, gain a sense of values and an appreciation for cultural diversity, and the other broader aims of the program, occupational education is left out. Credit its inclusion with blurring the image of what general education is or could be.

Another input to general education's difficulties is the expansion of higher education to include more than 12 million people. Free from the imposition of state-level requirements throughout most of its history, the university was able to develop an indigenous curriculum. Now that

40% of the 18-21 year olds are in college and adults see the institution as welcoming them throughout their lifetime, now that colleges look to the public for sizable funds, state and federal intervention is inevitable. When institutions could define their own patterns of study, it was possible for a strong president to leave a mark, for an institution to develop its own philosophical set. Some colleges were reorganized around specific curriculum plans when their prior offerings proved inadequate to attract a sufficient number of students to keep the college going. But in nearly all such cases it was the strong central figure who articulated the philosophy and used it to install a specialized curriculum and particular course requirements. Rarely have a group of local campus faculty and second-line administrators put together a viable curriculum. Rarely has a state legislature or a federal agency designed integrated general education programs. At best, the states mandate distribution requirements, thus ensuring some form of curriculum balance; at worst, through their reimbursement schedules, they encourage the institutions to build occupational programs and disciplinary offerings that fit together in a statewide network, thus stultifying indigenous curriculum development.

Last in this list of inputs to the fortunes of general education is the decline in literacy that has forced adult basic education into the colleges. When the colleges are concerned with teaching basic reading, composition, and computational skills, they suffer the loss of instruction in critical thinking, in cultural perspectives, in all the higher learnings. Arguing a need to design special experiences for special students, general education is shunted aside by those who fail to understand that it can be taught to everyone. And the influx of what are euphemistically

called "nontraditional students" has led to a failure of will even among some of the proponents of general education who propose instead warmth, love, and aliterate experiences for that group.

Except for an excessive concern with the academic disciplines, all these problems are more pronounced in community colleges than they are in universities. The lack of strong educational leadership, a failure to define general education consistently, the rise of occupational education, and adult literacy training affect community colleges markedly. The colleges have been so busy recruiting "new students" they have forgotten why they wanted them; the idea that they were to be generally educated has become lost. Student and community demands for relevant or instant education, for something pragmatic or useful, have been interpreted as a need for occupational training. And the colleges' place in statewide networks of postsecondary education has allowed them to excuse their curricular shortcomings by saying that true general education would not be accredited or would not articulate well with the senior institutions' curriculum.

Still, general education survives. Is it relevant? Pragmatic? Pertinent to community needs? Legitimate in the eyes of the public? General education in community colleges will rise or fall in answer to those questions. I am an advocate of general education and, in common with most advocates, I have my own particularized view of the phenomenon under discussion. Before dealing with general education, however, I want to define a few other terms. It may seem superfluous to reiterate the meaning of "education," "curriculum," and "instruction," in a paper addressed to professional educators, but through familiarity and repeated use these terms have lost all precision.

I define education as "the process of learning," of change in attitude or capability. It may take place in school or outside; it may be guided, monitored, or haphazard, but it is something that happens to the individual. I define curriculum as "any set of courses." Note that this definition excludes those aspects of schooling that take place outside a structured course format. This definition should not be difficult for community college staff members to accept; as participants in a commuter institution, they have always been uneasy about ascribing value to student activities, clubs, dormitories, and other appurtenances of the residential college. And I define instruction as "a series of events organized deliberately so that learning occurs." Instruction is our way of inducing people to learn. It has its own measurable assumptions and goals. And so I speak of education as a process, which separates it from the act of credentialling; curriculum as a set of courses, which excludes the learning that takes place outside of course formats, and instruction as a deliberate sequence, which differentiates it from a description of activities in which people called instructors typically engage. All the terms have to do with organized sequences--hour-long, week-long, year-long--designed to lead individuals from one set of abilities or tendencies to another; in short, to learn.

Certain testable premises stem from these definitions. First, people who study a subject are more likely to learn it than people who do not study it. Second, people who study something longer are more likely to learn more about it. Third, people who take courses in which the relationships among ideas are explicated are more likely to understand those relationships than people who take disintegrated courses. Fourth, some exposure to ideas is better than no exposure.

These deceptively simplistic assertions and definitions seem obvious. But many of our activities suggest that we are operating under different premises. It may be overstating only slightly to say that the race is on between courses and anti-courses as organizers for community college curriculum. Experiential learning; open-circuit television; the community education that is not education at all but is, in fact, providing other types of experiences to the participants, the idea that everyone should set their own goals, select their own media, assess their own learning--all these deny instruction and courses as organizing principles in education.

Why general education in community colleges? Statements on its behalf have been advanced not only by educators as far back as the earliest writers on community colleges--Lange, Koos, and Eells--but also by groups outside the academy. In 1947 the Truman Commission on Higher Education noted the importance of semiprofessional training, but contended that it should be "acquired in an environment that also cultivates general education, thus offering the student 'a combination of social understanding and technical competence'" (Park, p. 57). President Eisenhower's Committee ten years later and a Task Force on Higher Education set up by a subsequent president whose name escapes me also articulated that combination and saw it as the particular responsibility of the community colleges. More recently an American Council on Education task force recommended that any institution offering an associate degree should attest that its students have become familiar with general areas of knowledge and have gained "competency in analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills" (Chronicle, Feb. 6, 1978). The degrees should state not only that the students gained their training in

a college but also that the training included a general education component.

These groups see the community colleges as the place where general education should be offered not only because general education is necessary but also because other types of schools have tended to neglect it. The secondary schools were repositories of general education, but that function weakened during the 1950s and '60s. One problem was that secondary school teachers could not sustain general education without understanding its logic. Faced with rival theories and unconnected ideas, the teachers had trouble with all forms of general education--problem-solving, experience-based, interdisciplinary. The problem method depended on teachers' abilities to pick the most appropriate concepts from the various disciplines. Experience-based general education lost its critical standards; asking students how they feel about broad social issues, current events, their own lives is no basis for a curriculum. And, the instructors were too far removed from their academic disciplines to put together a successful interdisciplinary program.

The community colleges have been caught with some of the same problems. They have taken over much of the basic literacy training for adults and remedial education in all areas for high school graduates who failed to learn the first time around. But the organizing principles for these programs are little better developed, and the breakdown in standards of competency that occurred in high school a generation ago is also endemic. Faced with students of a type they never anticipated and demands for a variety of nontraditional studies to accommodate them, many community college educators have allowed their focus on achievement to be clouded. Further, in the past 20 years the move to occupational

education has led to severe curriculum imbalance. Students graduate from the programs with no core of basic knowledge; the alumni of nursing programs have learned nothing in common with the people who have studied computer data processing. Students learn job entry skills but do not learn how to continue to advance within the job (saying that the students may re-enter the community college for this training throughout their lifetime is tantamount to demanding lifelong dependency upon the institution). Occupational educators have also run the risk of frustrating trainees who find no jobs for which they were trained specifically. And, they betray their contempt for their students when they shift any intent for joy in learning or for the pleasure that goes with gaining insight into the noncredit recreational programs, the transfer programs, or out of the institutions all together. Occupational programs are not automatically relevant or valuable; they can be as spurious and meritricious as the most esoteric discipline-based course.

Numerous forces act to prevent excess in any curriculum for too long. Accrediting agencies, student enrollments, institutional funding sources, and the professional intelligence of the staff all act to maintain curriculum balance. The pendulum of community college curriculum swung decidedly toward occupational and remedial education in the 1960s and '70s; the 1980s may see it swing back toward preparing the generally educated person. Occupational education is too specialized; without the higher learning, colleges would be professional or occupational schools undifferentiated from industrial training enterprises. Basic education is limited in scope because it does not accommodate the human needs for self-expression, social interaction, and understanding of the world. The slogans, "salable skills" and "back to basics," are not sufficient for mounting a program in higher education.

Curiously, the idea of lifelong learning--the same phenomenon that excused the abandonment of general education--may be the best argument for maintaining it in community colleges. Hutchins took issue with the idea of lifelong learning that would train and retrain people for occupations, saying that anything to be taught to young people should be useful to them throughout their lives, that successive, ad hoc retraining to do specific skills would not lead them to understand anything of importance about their own life or the world around them. But it is precisely the older students who perceive the need for general education even while they seek upgrading within their own careers. They know that employment depends less on skill training than on the ability to communicate and get along with employers and coworkers. They know that a satisfying life demands more than production and consumption. They know they must understand the ways institutions and individuals interact, that for the sake of themselves and their progeny they must understand and act on social issues. They know they must maintain control over their lives, that what they learn assists them in maintaining individual freedom and dignity against a society that increasingly seeks to "deliver" health care, information, and the presumed benefits of living. And that is why they come to the colleges with interest in the arts, general concepts in science, understanding the environment, relations with their fellows, questions of personal life crises and developmental stages--all topics in a true general education curriculum.

So much for the generalized arguments. How do we decide what community colleges should offer? On what basis do they choose their programs now? Setting aside all the rhetoric of meeting everyone's educational needs and providing education to the limits of everyone's

potential--statements that offer no guidance to the establishment of programs--we seek both a justification for program inclusion and a means of assessing program value.

I would suggest that community colleges offer programs that meet three criteria: first, they should be verifiably educative; second, socially utilitarian; third, not readily available elsewhere. This rationale deserves elaboration. The verifiably educative dimension demands that anything that is offered in the community college qualify under the definition of instruction, a series of events organized deliberately so that learning occurs. "Verifiably" means that its effects can be assessed. This sounds obvious, but it rules out the types of events or presentations that are organized with little regard for whether or not people learn as a result.

The question of social utility is a useful benchmark to apply when we are comparing the merits of teaching contract bridge with teaching patterns of energy use; of learning flower arranging with learning ways of classifying the artistic output of a culture. If all forms of learning can be justified as being of equal merit, there is no reason to exclude any course or program, any set of intended learnings. "Of what apparent use is this to the community?" is the question that should be put to all curricular proposals.

A consideration of forms of learning that are readily available elsewhere would limit the resources going to high school equivalency education, basic skills training, and certain occupational and recreational programs in community colleges. And it would add a form of advanced learning skills that are the heart of general education. The rationale of verifiably educative, socially utilitarian, and not readily

available elsewhere, points directly at general education in the community college.

How is general education pursued now? Most frequently through distribution requirements. In the typical institution the requirements may be met by taking courses from a list arranged by department or division. The programs in liberal arts, business administration, general science, pre-engineering, accounting, architectural technology, and so on, state various numbers of minimum semester hours to be taken outside the main field. The social science electives may be selected from courses in anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology; the science electives from courses in physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy; the humanities electives from courses in music appreciation, art history, literature, philosophy; and the courses in communication from composition, speech, or writing. This is the most prevalent organizer because it satisfies the faculty whose training is in an academic discipline and whose allegiance is to it, allowing them to teach courses in their special interest. The Carnegie Council found an average of one faculty member to every 3.3 courses listed in community college catalogs. The cause is centered in institutional politics; the rationale is free choice; the result is curricular chaos.

Some community colleges have installed integrated courses recently. In preparing a general education plan for Los Medanos College in the mid-1970s, the organizers rejected many patterns of general education then existing in California. They had found that most colleges were

giving general education credit for virtually all academic transfer courses and some were giving credit for certain vocational or technical courses. Any course that had even a tenuous connection with science, social science, or humanities was being used to satisfy a general education requirement. The college rejected those patterns in favor of a core of six generic courses in behavioral, social, biological, and physical sciences, in the language arts and humanistic studies. Students are expected to enroll in one and preferably two of these courses each semester. To receive an associate degree the student must complete all six. And although it is not a requirement, students are encouraged to take a capstone course called "The Interdisciplinary Colloquy." The courses emphasize problem areas: the generic course in behavioral sciences is entitled "The Nature of People in Society" and deals with topics such as variant life styles, rationalism, and mysticism. The course in humanistic studies is entitled "The Creative Process" and considers themes in current literature. Every instructor is involved with the planning of the generic course that is introductory to the specialized courses they teach (Collins & Drexel, 1976).

The Los Medanos College General Education Plan is notable less for its content than for the way it was organized. The College has four divisions, each headed by a dean; hence the first principle: there is administrative control of the curriculum. Second, each course is required for all students; no exceptions. Third, the college employed a full-time staff development officer to work closely with the faculty in preparing the common course outlines. The result is that approximately a third of the college's total enrollments are in the general education basic courses. The courses are undergirded with special laboratories to teach

computational and compositional skills and with tutorials. All this in a college drawing its student population predominantly from a low socio-economic status community with a high proportion of ethnic minorities.

Citing additional examples of general education curriculum organization would not be useful because all are variations on the theme. Numerous descriptions of interdisciplinary survey courses in community colleges may be found in the literature. Course outlines have been reprinted, ways of organizing the courses have been detailed, and problems in maintaining course integrity have been discussed. As an example, interdisciplinary humanities courses have been described by Brown (1976), Nash (EJ 129 867), Zigerell (1977), and Dehnert (1977). Courses for general education have also been centered on contemporary problems: race relations, drug use and alcoholism, ecology and the environment, evaluating social controversies, world peace. In the 1930s such courses were often built on political problems; at that time, fascism vs. democracy; in the 1950s it was communism vs. democracy. In the 1960s political problems gave way to issues surrounding the individual, and courses on Man and Society, Understanding Human Values, and Intergroup Relations became more prevalent.

Justification for the problem-centered course is that study of contemporary situations better prepares the student for life than does the study of worlds remote in time and place. The nondisciplinary approach to instruction is defended with the argument that when faced with problems affecting their lives, people do not think as sociologists, scientists, or psychologists; they grapple with the issues in holistic fashion. The critics say those courses tend quickly to become superficial, make few intellectual demands on the students, and at worst tend to

reinforce prejudice rather than forcing students to examine values. The strongest argument in favor of the courses is that they are closest to general education goals, that if we expect students to use critical thinking for the solution of problems in their lives, they should practice that behavior in the classroom; if they are to develop sets of values by which they guide their lives, they should examine those values as they relate to the situations they will face.

Surveys, interdisciplinary courses, themes, and problems--all these approaches have been tried and may still be found in the diverse entity that is American higher education. Add, too, the general education forms that never become popular: the integrated course organized by concept--symmetry, equilibrium, motion, communication; the study of the Great Books organized around the Dialogue; and the developmental approach encompassing all the activities of the college, the residence halls, counseling and guidance, student clubs and facilities which, although it may be the form of education most likely to truly change the students, does not fit the masses of casual students who fit their courses around their hours of employment.

What of the future? There will always be something called general education in community colleges, regardless of how it is organized. Inherently the colleges are neither more nor less able to offer a distribution of courses that would satisfy a general education requirement than are the universities or secondary schools; it is a matter of labeling and packaging. However, their students are less likely to accept distribution requirements because the associate degree has little value in the marketplace and the universities will allow students to transfer without it. Integrated general education courses, on the other hand,

could find a home in community colleges if faculty and administrators believed in their value. The faculty are not closely tied to the academic disciplines, nor do they typically engage in research and specialized writing. Many of the colleges have formed divisional instead of departmental structures. The colleges have some advantage, too, in developing problem-centered courses in general education through their ties to the local community.

For which of the many types of students coming to community colleges shall general education be provided? The answer is that the community college either provides general education for all its enrollees or it forfeits its position in higher education. The colleges must guarantee the availability of general education throughout a person's life. Lifelong learning is more than the opportunity for successive retraining as one's job becomes obsolete; it is access to the form of general studies that leads to understanding of self and society. And general education must not be optional lest the gulf between social classes in America is accentuated as members of the elite group learn to control their environment, while the lower classes are given occupational education and training in basic skills. The colleges must provide general education for the 20-25% of their students who transfer to senior institutions, for the occupational students who will not transfer to universities, and for the adults who see the world changing and want to understand more about their environment.

A key question in general education is "How?" The question must be resolved in the context of the open access institution. "Open access" means "open exit" as well. If a student may enter and drop at will, the idea of curriculum as a set of courses is severely limited. There can

be no continuity of curriculum when a student takes one course, goes away for a number of years, and comes back to take one more. This casual approach is unprecedented in higher education and requires special planning if general education is to be effective. At the very least, each course must be considered in toto rather than as part of a set.

Those who would plan general education must take care that they not repeat the cosmic rationalizations offered by apologists for general education in the universities who saw the students becoming imaginative, creative, sensitive and perceptive to beauty, knowing about nature, man, and culture, acting with maturity, balance, and perspective, and so on. We are not going to effect that; the colleges are simply not that influential. On the other hand, general education must not be debased by tying the term to reading, writing, calculating, operating an automobile, using appliances, consuming products, practicing health, preparing income tax forms, borrowing money, and so on. As important as these tasks are, they can be learned elsewhere.

The rationale for general education in the community college is the freedom enjoyed by the informed citizen. Only when the person is able to weigh the arguments of the experts is he truly free. These experts may be arguing for issues of the environment, whether to put power plants or oil docks in or near cities. They may be advising on governmental questions. Or they may be telling the people who can be born, who has a right to live, what it means to be healthy, and how, where, and when one should die. People need to understand how things work; social systems and persuaders, artists and computers. General education is for the creation of a free citizenry.

Freedoms gained through a general education extend from the person to the society. The ability to think critically, to place one's own problems in broad perspective, to make informed choices about the conduct of one's own life is the cornerstone of freedom for the individual. The idea of freedom is different now than it was in an earlier era. To be free economically does not mean setting up one's own farm; it means having alternatives for working within the modern corporate system. To be free politically does not mean going to town meetings and deciding on local issues; it means understanding the consequences of actions taken by bureaucrats and the ways of influencing or countering those actions. Being free morally and personally does not mean abiding by community mores; it means having the ability to understand and predict the consequences one's actions has on himself and his fellows in the context of a higher order of morality. According to Broudy, the form of freedom gained through general education means "that the individual citizen could make up his <u>own</u> mind in political affairs, carve his <u>own</u> economic career with a minimum of interference, and could shape his <u>own</u> decisions by the dictates of his <u>own</u> conscience.... It is freedom for self-mastery as much as freedom from restraint by others.... Knowledge and insight into the principles of the good life are necessary conditions for genuine freedom.... That is why throughout the ages general studies in one form or another have been regarded as the content of liberal education, education for those who would be free..." (1974, pp. 27-28).

So stated, it still remains to put general education together in a fashion that serves the various types of students attending community colleges. The question is not one of the survival of general education itself; it will survive if the culture is to hold itself together. The

question is the extent of general education that will take place in community colleges. Several forces are keeping it there; tradition or inertia is of prime importance. But there are also several currents moving against it: the additional purposes and functions assigned to community colleges beginning with occupational education in the 1920s and, more recently, the education of the mentally deficient; and the attractiveness of alternative ways of learning elsewhere, including the widespread availability of paperback books, films, and other media. And yet the future of programs is toward defined areas, away from the "drop in and take what you want" phenomenon. Public funding will not cover that type of institution indefinitely. Tuition is coming fast and public subsidies will be maintained only for programs with defined outcomes. Relicensure for paraprofessionals is growing and that too will put students into programs with defined beginning and ending points.

And so the crosscurrents that affect community colleges generally affect their involvement with general education. I have to be optimistic because I believe in the idea of the community college and in the idea of general education within it. Further, there is an irreducible minimum in curriculum, staff, and students below which the college ceases to be. The curriculum must be educative; staff must act like educators; students must learn. A college cannot operate with the curriculum perceived as a set of haphazard events, a corps of part-time instructors with no commitment to the institution in general, let alone to the planning of curriculum in particular, and students who drop in casually if there is nothing better for them to do that week. Such an institution may continue functioning, but it has lost its guiding ethos.

I am assuming that the trend toward part-time students served with ad hoc presentations by part-time staff members will reverse itself during the 1980s. The United States has television, fast food franchises, availability for instant gratification; it does not need the community college as one more such environment. The pragmatism that flourishes in the community colleges has led to the effrontery of spokespersons who have suggested that the colleges can solve all community problems. And it has led to the belief that the colleges are meeting community needs when they serve up a pastiche of unconnected presentations. (Not to pick on community colleges--from 1965 until recently the universities had the same idea.) A general education that leads to ways of knowing and the common beliefs and language that bind the society together is offered in every culture through rituals, schools, apprenticeships. Our society has assigned a portion of this task to the community colleges. I do not believe that the community college leaders will shirk their responsibility.

Curriculum is not put together in a vacuum, nor is it the responsibility of each professional person acting independently. A general education curriculum needs a faculty group interacting together, a group that is coordinated by a dean or division head or program manager who can assist the faculty in role redefinition. This leads to the first premise: faculty role redefinition is essential. General education cannot be considered only--or even primarily--classroom-centered. The faculty member who wants to hide behind his classroom door and develop his own curriculum and instructional strategies cannot beneficially participate in a general education program. The part-time instructor with only casual commitment is of limited value as well. The general

education program demands a corps of professional staff members who know how to differentiate their responsibilities and are willing to work together.

The leadership for a general education program must come from a staff person who sees it as his sole responsibility. The president can set the tone for general education but is limited in influence on curriculum. Deans of instruction formerly dealt with general education, but in most colleges they have become senior grade personnel managers. The faculty in general cannot accept responsibility because, as recent surveys have shown (Cohen & Brawer, 1977), there is not enough faculty interest in curriculum and instruction per se at present. A general education program demands a program head; the title is not important.

Third, the general education program should be vertically integrated. The model for this exists now in several technological fields. Wherever there is a program in nursing there is a Director of Nursing who attends to curriculum, student recruiting and admissions, student placement, and the instructional aspects of the program. General education must be similarly organized.

Next, the general education program should be managed at the campus level. Strasser (1977, pV-8) has suggested the importance of each campus in his multi-campus district to have its own "philosophy and operational definition to guide the...campus general education requirements and campus liberal studies." He sees the need for "various patterns of liberal studies and general education at the college." He is on target because, apart from the managerial problems in attempting to coordinate instructional programs on many campuses from a central office, the same type of program does not fit all campuses within a district. Granted that

powerful forces are leading toward more homogeneity among campuses--and indeed among all colleges within a state--this trend can be turned around. But campus faculty and administrators must understand the importance of taking the leadership in curriculum development if they would avert centralized curriculum decision making.

The general education faculty would be organized into four divisions: Culture, Communications, Institutions, and Environment. The faculty in these divisions would separate themselves from their academic departments or the other divisions into which the rest of the faculty are placed. The general education program would have its own budget. The faculty would prepare and operate the integrated courses, course modules, course exemption examinations, student follow-up studies, and relationships with high schools and senior institutions. Funding such divisions would not be a problem; they would generate enough FTE to pay for all their efforts. They would do their own staff development as well.

Although each campus or each college would develop its own programs, it is possible to trace an outline of how the programs would operate. Begin with general education in the occupational programs. First, a delegate from each of the four divisions would examine the occupational programs to determine where intervention might be made. Course modules--portions of courses to be inserted into the occupational programs--would be sought. As an example, in a fashion design program, the faculty from Institutions might prepare a short unit on the role of fashions in society; the Communications staff might do one on advertising copy and another on distribution, ordering, and inventory control; the Culture group would do one on fashion as folk art and another on traditional symbolism in fashion. For the Allied Health programs general education

modules on the process of grieving around the world and dealing with the terminal patient can be done by the Culture faculty; the faculty from Institutions would do a unit on medical ethics. The program in automotive maintenance and transport would be offered modules on energy utilization by the Environment staff, the laws governing highway construction and usage by the Institutions group, the automobile in American culture by the Culture faculty.

These types of course sections or modules would be worked out in consultation with the occupational program faculty. They might start with one lecture only, tying the occupation to the broader theme and could eventually work into entire courses, depending on the success of the module and the apparent desirability of continuing it. Some occupational programs might accept entire courses in Medical Ethics or the Rise of Technology, courses that encompass dynamics of the occupation and themes and problems coming from general education. The occupational programs would pay the costs for such courses and course modules.

The four general education divisions would build their own courses for the rank and file of students enrolled in transfer programs. Each would do one course only, to be required for every degree-bound student at the college. The courses would be organized around themes. The intent of each would be to point up how contemporary and past, local and distant peoples have dealt with the problems common to all: communications, energy utilization, social institutions, the search for truth, beauty, and order. The courses would be prepared by the general education staff, specialists in that curriculum form. They would not be organized around academic disciplines. Their goal is a free people in a free society, thinking critically, appreciating their cultural tradition, understanding their environment and their place within it.

The general education faculty on each campus would build their own four required courses and, depending on local conditions, there might be great variation among them. The Communications staff might do a course called How We Communicate, dealing with propaganda, advertising, interpersonal communications, and literary criticism. Literary criticism? Of course, it sharpens the eye. This need not be criticism of Joyce, Steinbeck, and Salinger. The students might criticize such contemporary literary forms as the administrative memo, the protest statement, the news release. They would learn to read the language behind the words.

The Institutions staff might build a course around Man and His Institutions. This would not be a Survey of Social Science or a History of Western Civilization course; it would emphasize how people have had to grapple with social institutions throughout the history of civilized society. How did the English kings impinge on the lives of their people? How were the Pharaohs able to organize the populace into tremendous labor gangs? What is the grip that modern China has on the minds of its people? How must we deal with our own bureaus and commissions? One hundred themes come to mind; all are valid for a course in Institutions. Knowledge of terminology in an academic discipline is not a proper goal; ways of identifying spurious documents or the quality of evidence in history have no place in this course; the jargon of the sociologists and psychologists is out of bounds. Leave the causes of the Spanish-American War and patterns of kinship systems to the specialized courses in History and Anthropology.

The Culture staff might do a course on Man and Culture. The theme would be how people have attempted to come to grips with the ultimate questions of all mankind: Who are we? Where did we come from? What

mark can we leave? The content would be the types of self-expression through art, music, literature, and dance. Comparative religion is properly a part of this course only if it is based on the question, "Why religion at all?" The way novelists have tried to speak to the human condition can be explored; the names of the principal characters in the 19th century Russian novel are irrelevant.

The course on the Environment could incorporate elements of Astronomy, Biology, Physics--all the earth, life, and physical sciences. It is concerned with effects of technology, patterns of energy consumption, shifting concepts in earth and space sciences, how agricultural engineering can be used to solve the problem of famine, what can be known through empirical science and what can be known only through intuition, introspection, or revelation.

This pattern of each faculty group doing one large theme-centered course would allow general education to have its own organizing principles. The course must not be a few weeks each in academic disciplines lest it fracture along disciplinary lines. And, if provision is to be made for a student to exempt or test out of the course, the general education program staff must develop and administer its own examination or other measure of knowledge sufficiency. Nothing in this type of reorganization would do away with the specialized courses; the college would still teach Spanish for Correctional Officers, General Chemistry, Introduction to Music, and the hundreds of other discipline-based courses that make up a full curriculum. However, the four theme-centered courses might supplant certain general or introductory courses now offered.

The general education staff would build modules and specially designed courses for the occupational students, theme-centered courses

for the transfer students, and yet another type of course for the large and growing number of adult drop ins. These casual students, attending the institution part time, picking up courses that strike their fancy because of current interest or because of the social interaction that the college offers, need something different. Naturally they would be invited to enroll in the major theme-centered courses. However, they need special problems courses, an extension of the problems touched on in the broader themes courses. A model for this group is afforded through current practice in community college adult divisions and university extension divisions. In the extension divisions nationwide about half the course offerings are occupational or career ladder preparation; one-fourth are recreational; and one-fourth can be subsumed under the term general education. In the community colleges the ratio is slightly different, slanted away from the occupational and more toward the recreational, but the general education proportion is about the same. Here is where the specialized course of local or general interest comes into play. If sufficient interest in history of a local labor dispute or latest theories in black holes can be found, the general education faculty will take part either by offering it themselves or by enlisting the ad hoc assistance of other staff members. The important point is that these courses must be offered and their availability advertised. It is incumbent upon the general education faculty to tap community interest, set up, and promote these courses. The common characteristic of the courses is that they be educative; they must not be presentations of unknown effect. And they are a faculty responsibility; let the community services directors stay with the recreational offerings.

The instructional forms used in these courses can be as varied as necessary. A general education faculty of the type described may find they need to write their own extensive syllabi and text materials. They would probably find it expedient to divide responsibilities, with some of their members lecturing, others building reproducible media, others writing and administering examinations. But they must stay together as a group organized to provide integrated general education. They will find li..tle difficulty in attaining accreditation of such courses and approval by transferring institutions. The community colleges are in better position now than they ever were in their history to articulate and defend their general education offerings; the senior institutions cannot be excessively stringent in their interpretation of what shall be qualified for credit at a time when nearly half the college freshmen begin in two-year institutions.

To conclude, this form of general education can and should be constructed. The greatest impediment to it is within the institution itself. A sufficient number of college leaders--trustees, administrators, and the faculty themselves--must see the urgency of this pattern of curriculum development. The conflict is between pluralism as a goal--each person studying when he wants, how, and where he wants--and the use of curriculum as an aid to social integration. If individualism is raised to such heights that we cannot see the common themes underlying the free person in the free society it will be impossible to devise a core curriculum.

I would not try to promote a general education curriculum by citing the dangers of social disintegration. Whether or not our society is about to fall apart as it did in the 1860s and as it nearly did in the

1960s or whether it is in danger of being welded together irrationally is not within our control. But we can play our own small part in keeping our democracy going, in keeping our society open without letting it drift apart. The mass media, influential as they are, operate in a different way. We need shared beliefs more pervasive than the short-term emotive responses engendered through them. Unity rests on intelligence, not on tribal instincts. Freedom rests on people deciding together what shall be done.

The entire academic content of community college education is in jeopardy. The threat does not come from occupational education--the technical programs may be and usually are quite academic. The threat comes from the college form that offers a few presentations on television, a sizable number of community service programs, and credit courses in hundreds of locations with noncredit options--all with no attempt to ensure that the presentations are educative, socially utilitarian, and not readily available elsewhere. As Lombardi puts it, "If in the interests of the greater enrollments the colleges concentrate their efforts on courses, activities, programs that have little or no currency in higher education students with aspirations beyond mere attendance will seek their education elsewhere" (1978, p. 28). The threat comes also from our own proudly stated policies that encourage everyone to drop in when they want, take what they want, and drop out when they want--the ultimate in curriculum disintegration. We are in danger of occupying a twilight status in the stream of higher education. Let us not go quietly into the dark night.

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